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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

FOR SPECIAL ENVOY CUMBER FROM AMBASSADOR MORIARTY

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [OVIP](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: EMBASSY DHAKA WELCOMES OIC SPECIAL ENVOY CUMBER

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) As a large moderate Muslim majority nation whose citizens highly value democracy, Bangladesh is a key USG friend in the Islamic world and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Bangladesh has been active in multilateral fora including SAARC and the UN, where it has been a leading contributor of troops for Peacekeeping Operations around the world. Your visit will provide an opportunity to try to shape Bangladesh's efforts within the OIC and to convey USG perspectives on the three pillars of the U.S.-Bangladesh relationship: democracy, development and denial of space to terrorists. On behalf of the U.S. Mission in Dhaka, I am pleased to welcome you to Bangladesh. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) Throughout its 37-year history, Bangladesh has been a proud and active member of the OIC. Member nations have viewed Bangladesh as an honest broker on issues that often divide OIC members, including the Iran-Iraq war and Israel-Palestine issues. In your meetings with top leaders in the Caretaker Government, you should seek their views on ways to promote dialogue between the United States and the OIC. You should also encourage the CTG to adhere to its elections roadmap and continue its ongoing dialogue with political parties.

DEMOCRACY

3. (SBU) The first pillar of our relationship with Bangladesh is democracy promotion. While an unelected Caretaker Government (CTG) currently runs Bangladesh during a State of Emergency imposed in January 2007, the CTG remains committed to holding national elections by the end of 2008; the Chief Adviser recently announced elections would take place the third week of December. The Caretaker Government is implementing a massive voter registration project that has drawn praise from its citizens and international experts. This is one of the important reforms that the Government has introduced to build a stronger foundation for Bangladesh's young democracy. The CTG also has begun a dialogue with political parties aimed at ensuring a smooth transition back to democratic government. This dialogue will be underway during your visit.

DEVELOPMENT

4. (SBU) The USG has a robust assistance program in Bangladesh that targets food security, economic growth, education, health and nutrition, disaster management, democracy and governance. We project that USG food and development assistance to Bangladesh will reach USD 150 million in FY2008. While not the largest bilateral donor, the United States plays a leadership role among Bangladesh's

development partners in areas such as democracy and governance, disaster preparedness and response, food aid, and avian influenza preparedness and response. The U.S. has provided over \$5 billion in bilateral assistance since Bangladesh's independence. The U.S. led the international community's response to the devastation caused by Cyclone Sidr in November 2007. Along with the assistance from bilateral donors and multilateral aid agencies, non governmental organizations also played a major role in responding to the cyclone.

Individuals and groups associated with leading Islamic countries also provided a great deal of aid, but in a less than fully transparent manner.

15. (SBU) While in Bangladesh you will have an opportunity to meet with participants in our Leaders of Influence program, which is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). This program aims to promote development themes as well as the value of tolerance to religious and community leaders. We educate participating leaders on the conditions needed to achieve sustainable development, including health, education, economic growth, women's empowerment and crisis management. The leaders in the program have participated in exchanges with religious and community leaders from other nations, including OIC members and the United States.

16. (SBU) Bangladesh is home to the OIC-endowed Islamic University of Technology (IUT). The university offers degrees in engineering, technology and technical education; though its students come from many nations, the majority are Bangladeshi. You will meet with representatives of IUT's students and faculty, all of whom are male. You will have an opportunity to discuss U.S. cooperation with the OIC in the areas of science and technology, education, and the

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advancement of women.

DENIAL OF SPACE TO TERRORISTS

17. (SBU) Bangladeshis are immensely proud of their Bengali language and culture. At the time of Bangladesh's independence in 1971, those who saw Islam as the primary source of identity opposed those who fought for a secular state. In particular, religiously based political parties who supported Pakistan in 1971 were largely discredited and often branded as collaborators or war criminals. This stigma continues to the present day, and in part as a result of these traditions, more extreme forms of Islam have only a small foothold in Bangladesh. We continue to promote democracy and development as a means of strengthening Bangladesh's traditions of tolerance and moderation. We have actively reached out to the Jamaat-e-Islami, Bangladesh's largest Islamic-based political party.

We have sought to encourage moderate voices within Islam, including within the Islamic political parties. We have an active program of outreach to madrassas and other faith-based organizations. We sponsored a visit to Bangladesh by a Bangladeshi-American U.S. Navy chaplain earlier this year. Your visit will be an opportunity to underscore these themes, as well as seek Bangladesh's views on ways to promote dialogue between Muslim communities and the United States.

COMMENT

18. (U) Bangladesh is currently at a crossroads as it seeks to restore democracy, ensure greater prosperity for its citizens, and rejoin the community of nations. It is in the U.S. interest to support Bangladesh's political transition and encourage it to play a responsible role in international organizations such as the OIC. We also hope that Bangladesh will join us on issues such as Kosovo's independence, and your advocacy on this will reinforce our efforts. Finally, from a public diplomacy standpoint, your visit is ideally timed to underscore our message of respect for Islam and a desire to reach out to the Islamic world. We look forward to your visit.

Moriarty